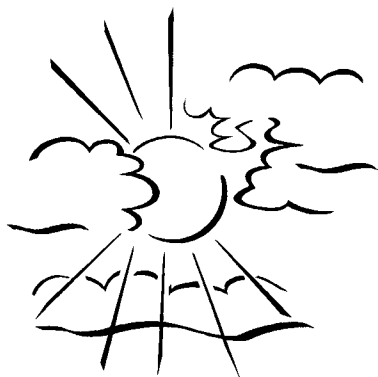


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

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TOPIC	PAGE
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	2-20
Health Care	21-25
Juvenile Justice	26-27
Homelessness	28
Adoption	29
Charities	30
Labor and Economic Growth	31-32

*Important story at this spot

Jailmate Says Adoptive Mom Hit Son With Hammer

Couple Faces Murder Charges In 7-Year-Old's Death

POSTED: 4:07 pm EST March 6, 2006

MASON, Mich. -- A jailmate said Monday that Lisa Holland told her she hit her 7-year-old adopted son in the head with a hammer, and that her husband took away his body in garbage bags.

Crystal Mountain, who was in jail for solicitation at the time, testified in court about her Feb. 5 conversation with Lisa Holland. Lisa Holland and her husband, Tim Holland, were in jail after being charged with open murder and first-degree child abuse concerning Ricky Holland (pictured).

Mountain said that Lisa Holland told her that their son's body lay in the hallway of their Williamston home for an hour, and that Tim Holland then put the body into plastic bags and left the house. Lisa Holland said she cleaned up the blood after he left, Mountain said.

Ricky Holland went missing last July 2. Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in rural Ingham County in late January. Tim and Lisa Holland each deny being responsible for Ricky's death, and each has accused the other of killing him.

"She called Tim a stupid man," Mountain said of Lisa. She added that Lisa Holland also told her that "it's his fault they're in jail. All they have to do is stay quiet."

Mountain said that Lisa Holland told her Ricky was a hard child to control, and that she would have to use restraints on him and guide him by his neck.

Under questioning from Lisa Holland's defense attorney, Mountain said she has bipolar mood disorder and acknowledged having short-term memory problems. She said she had been hit in the head five or six years ago.

Tim Holland began crying as Mountain gave her testimony. Lisa Holland kept her head down and took notes.

The testimony came on the fifth day of a preliminary examination for the Hollands in Mason District Court south of Lansing.

Also Monday, Ricky Holland's first-grade teacher said that the boy would steal food even after he had already eaten.

"He would just eat and eat and eat," said Peggy Cox, a teacher at a Jackson elementary school that Ricky attended before moving to the Lansing area.

Cox said it appeared that Ricky didn't expect to eat at home after school. It was "like he was stocking it up in his body," she said.

Prosecutors have said the food deprivation issue is evidence of child abuse.

Under questioning from defense attorneys, Cox said she never reported any suspected malnutrition to authorities or Ricky's parents. Cox wrote a letter to a child psychiatrist early in the 2003-2004 school year stating she did not think Ricky was stealing food because he was hungry.

Michigan

Inmate says mom admitted killing son

She hit 7-year-old with a hammer, woman testifies

March 7, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

MASON -- Lisa Holland told a jail mate how she killed her adoptive 7-year-old son, Ricky, the inmate testified Monday.

"She just told me she had hit him with a hammer," said Crystal Mountain, 35, who is in the Ingham County Jail on a solicitation charge.

She said Holland, 34, who initially blamed her husband for killing Ricky, admitted Feb. 5 that she killed the boy in the hallway of their Williamston Township home.

Ricky's father, Tim Holland, 36, put his body in garbage bags and removed it from the house.

While he was gone, Lisa Holland cleaned up the blood, Mountain testified in 55th District Court in Mason.

The couple reported Ricky missing on July 2.

Mountain forged a relationship with Lisa Holland when she wrote a note expressing sympathy for her because a lot of other inmates were calling her names.

Shortly after, she said Lisa Holland told her about Ricky, who she said had a behavioral problem.

"He was a very hard child to control," she said Lisa Holland told her. "She always had to use restraints on him and guide him by his neck, stuff like that."

Lisa and Tim Holland blame each other in Ricky's death. Tim Holland led authorities to the boy's skeletal remains on Jan. 27. They each are charged with murder and first-degree child abuse in his death.

Mountain said Lisa Holland told her that her husband is "a stupid man."

"It was his fault they were in jail," she said Lisa Holland told her. "All he had to do was be quiet."

Mountain, who admitted to having some problems with short-term memory and takes Prozac to control bipolar disorder, said she took notes after talking to Lisa Holland. She said she also took some court papers from Lisa Holland's cell. But she testified that she never read them and returned them soon after.

Mountain also said her testimony wasn't in exchange for prosecutorial favors.

"Ricky's not for sale," she said. "We're not selling Ricky's story."

In the fifth day of testimony in the preliminary examination, which is expected to continue for the next three weeks, Ricky's first-grade teacher also talked about Lisa Holland.

Marguerite (Peggy) Cox said that Ricky's mother often brought him to school by "kind of marching him down the hallway" by his arm.

"She basically humiliated him a lot of times in the hallway outside of my classroom," Cox said. Cox said Ricky was almost always hungry. He often took half-eaten food from the trash -- even though he told her he had eaten breakfast before coming to school.

She said Ricky "would throw a fit" when she told him he couldn't eat food from the garbage. But that was the only serious behavioral issue she had with him.

At Lisa Holland's request, she said she kept a daily log of any problems with Ricky. Lisa Holland would contact her either in person or by phone daily to check up on Ricky. Cox said she had her classroom phone shut off because of Lisa Holland's repeated calls.

Ricky "was not the worst-behaved child in my classroom that year, by far," Cox said, adding that Lisa Holland's involvement was greater than that of any other parent she has worked with in 21 years of teaching.

In early April 2004, Lisa Holland told Cox that she was taking Ricky out of her class so she could homeschool him.

"Mrs. Holland stated it was too stressful to have Ricky in school. And she was going to homeschool Ricky during her pregnancy." At that time, Lisa Holland was pregnant with her first biological child.

Cox said she was disappointed in that decision, and when she last saw Ricky, the boy was crying. " 'Mom, I don't want to leave school. I want to stay in school,' " Cox said Ricky told his mother as he left Cascades Elementary in Jackson for the final time.

Cox said she met Tim Holland only once, but Ricky talked about him a lot.

"He loved his father very much," Cox said.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Inmate: Mom admitted killing

She testifies Lisa Holland told her she hit Ricky with hammer, helped husband dispose of body.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News
March 7, 2006

MASON -- A fellow inmate testified Monday that accused child murderer Lisa Holland admitted bashing her adopted 7-year-old son, Ricky, in the head with a hammer.

Crystal Mountain, who said she has short-term memory loss, testified that Holland talked to her while both were at the Ingham County Jail.

Mountain's version of events runs contrary to Holland's earlier statements to police, in which she claimed her husband, Tim, killed the child.

She said Lisa Holland complained during a jailhouse conversation that the child was hard to handle. Mountain, jailed for solicitation for prostitution, said Holland described how she and her husband, Tim, stowed the child's body in garbage bags, and he disposed of it in rural Ingham County.

"She told me she hit him with a hammer in his head in her house in the hall," Mountain testified. "I asked, 'Did he suffer for long?' And she didn't answer. And I asked her, 'How long did he lay there?' And she said about an hour."

The case has raised the ire of Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature. Both have vowed to investigate how the Hollands were allowed to adopt Ricky and his three siblings from state foster care, and why the concerns of school employees and neighbors weren't heeded by social workers. The inmate's testimony came during the fifth day of the Hollands' preliminary hearing on murder charges.

Tim Holland cried quietly, and his wife took notes on a yellow legal pad.

Mountain told 55th District Judge Rosemarie E. Aquilina that she and Lisa talked during the brief daily periods they were allowed out of solitary confinement cells at the Ingham County Jail. When she returned to her cell, Mountain said she scratched out notes of their conversations.

She said that during their first talk, Lisa Holland told Mountain that Tim killed Ricky. But during their fourth conversation, on Feb. 5, Mountain said Lisa admitted she killed the child.

The Hollands were arrested Jan. 27, after Tim Holland led authorities to Ricky's body in rural Ingham County, more than six months after the child disappeared.

Mountain, who admitted on cross-examination that she took medication for depression and bipolar disorder and that she had short-term memory loss as a result of a head injury, said Lisa Holland called her husband "a stupid man" and said it was "his fault they were in jail."

"All he had to do was be quiet, and she was gutless not to leave him," Mountain said Lisa Holland told her.

Lisa, Mountain said, told her that she and Tim "put Ricky's body into the garbage bag and Tim put his body somewhere and she was to remove the mess and the blood" in the house.

Mountain admitted to Lisa Holland's attorney, Andrew Abood, that she had taken confidential material from Lisa's cell, but said she had returned it unopened.

"She's a jailhouse snitch who stole my client's stuff," Abood told Aquilina.

When asked by Abood if she had been compensated for her testimony, Mountain replied:
"Ricky's not for sale."

Also Monday, Ricky's first-grade teacher, Marguerita Cox, testified that Lisa Holland forbade him from participating in classroom parties or taking any of the candy or treats enjoyed by other children.

Cox, a teacher at Cascades Elementary School in Jackson, where the family lived before moving to Williamston, described Lisa Holland as being obsessed with the child, calling her at least twice daily to find out if Ricky was behaving in school.

"It got to be too much, so I had the office shut my phone off," Cox said.

The teacher said she never saw Lisa Holland, 34, encourage or praise the boy, and she never hugged or kissed him or showed him any affection.

She said Lisa Holland frequently humiliated Ricky in front of his classmates.

Cox said the mother ordered her to place Ricky in restraints before he left the classroom every day to get onto the school bus, but the teacher refused because she believed it would shame the child.

Cox testified that Ricky had more bumps and bruises than a typical first-grader, and appeared to be constantly hungry. She admitted on cross-examination that she never made a report to state protective services workers because she did not suspect abuse.

Testimony will continue Friday. If sufficient evidence is presented, the two will be bound over for trial in Ingham County Circuit Court in Mason.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Published March 7, 2006

Mom said she killed Ricky, fellow jail inmate testifies

Court testimony: Hammer blow was fatal to 7-year-old

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

MASON - Lisa Holland said she killed her son Ricky by hitting him on the head with a hammer, a fellow inmate at the Ingham County Jail testified Monday.

Lisa Holland said the boy's body then lay in a hallway of the Holland's home for about an hour before she and Tim Holland wrapped it in garbage bags, and "Tim placed his body somewhere," according to testimony from Crystal Mountain.

Mountain's testimony came during the fifth day of Lisa and Tim Holland's preliminary hearing in 55th District Court. The couple face murder charges in Ricky's death and also are charged with first-degree child abuse.

The hearing will determine whether the murder case against them will advance to trial.

Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood repeatedly challenged Mountain - who still is serving jail time on a solicitation charge - at one point calling her a "jailhouse snitch" who lacked credibility.

Under cross-examination, Mountain acknowledged she suffers from short-term memory loss - the result of being struck in the head several years ago during a robbery.

Mountain, 35, who was jailed Jan. 24 - three days before the Hollands were arrested - said she befriended Lisa after writing her a few letters, expressing sympathy.

One day, Lisa hugged her, she said, beginning the friendship that led to Lisa's disclosure about what happened to Ricky.

Mountain further testified that Lisa Holland blamed her husband for why the couple was arrested.

"She called him a stupid man and said it was his fault they were in jail," Mountain testified. "(She said) all he had to do was be quiet."

Tim Holland reported Ricky missing July 2. The child's remains were found seven months later, after Tim Holland led police to the boy's body in rural Ingham County.

Also Monday, Ricky's first-grade teacher, Peggy Cox, said while she did not suspect he was being abused, she did believe Lisa Holland was intentionally humiliating him.

Lisa Holland often would pull Ricky down the hallway by his arm, said the Jackson school teacher, embarrassing him in front of other students.

The Hollands lived in Jackson, where Ricky attended Cascades Elementary School, before the family moved to Williamston in May 2005.

Cox also said forcing Ricky to wear a harness on the school bus added to his humiliation.

But under cross-examination from Abood, Cox said she did not suspect Ricky was being abused and never made a report to school or state officials.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Infant's Injuries Lead To Arrest Of Parents

6-Week-Old Listed In Serious Condition

POSTED: 10:09 am EST March 7, 2006

DETROIT -- The parents of a 6-week-old boy were arrested on suspicion of child abuse Monday.

Shawn Goike was taken to Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit on Monday afternoon after his father, Timothy Goike, said he accidentally injured the infant's leg, Local 4 reported. But doctors said the boy had more injuries, including a broken arm, a broken clavicle, wounds to his liver and several bruises, the station reported.

Family friend Richard Adams said there is no way Timothy Goike could have harmed his son. The boy's grandmother said she hopes she can have custody when the infant is released from the hospital, Local 4 reported. The boy remained in serious condition at the hospital Tuesday morning.

Charges are pending in the investigation, Local 4 reported.

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Accused Gunman May Have Had Different Target

Police On Lookout

POSTED: 6:45 pm EST March 6, 2006

Police are searching for the man who they say shot and killed a 12-year-old boy outside of a car wash.

Detroit police say Christopher George Stanfield, 22, was a customer of the Executive One Car Wash where Korey Reid, 12, worked.

Reid worked at the car wash, on McNichols Road in northwest Detroit, to earn extra money while on winter break.

Investigators believe Stanfield was aiming at someone else, but shot Korey instead, Local 4 reported.

Police are searching for the accused gunman, and ask citizens to be on the lookout. If you have any information, contact Detroit police.

Student teacher faces sex charge

Tuesday, March 07, 2006

By Lisa Medendorp and Teresa Taylor Williams
MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITERS

A former student teacher at Mona Shores' Lincoln Park Elementary School has been charged with sexually touching a young girl in a classroom during a lunch break.

Norton Shores police said Peter Andrew Morden, 30, is expected to turn himself in this morning to face a charge of second-degree criminal sexual conduct, which is a 15-year felony.

The incident was reported on Feb. 2.

Morden, who had been placed in Mona Shores through Western Michigan University, only was in the classroom 20 days prior to the incident, police and school officials said.

Norton Shores Police Lt. Timothy LaVigne said Morden allegedly touched the girl under her clothing while the two were alone in a classroom during the lunch hour.

"She asked if she could eat lunch in the room with him," LaVigne said. "He was entering grades on a computer at the time she came in."

LaVigne said the child entered her grade in the computer, and "according to both, she was on his lap when the incident took place." The child then "left the room and went down to the principal's office," LaVigne said. "She reported it right away."

School officials say they also took action right away.

An estimated 600 Lincoln Park parents officially were notified Monday by letter that on the day the incident occurred, the student teacher "was immediately discharged, escorted off the premises and directed not to return to the building or to contact any students or staff."

The letter, signed by Assistant Superintendent Todd R. Geerlings and Lincoln Park Principal Heidi Sunderhaft Christiansen, started by saying that a recent school district investigation revealed that a Lincoln Park student teacher "behaved in an inappropriate manner in the school building."

Mona Shores Superintendent Terry Babbitt said the letter was prompted by information received Friday from law-enforcement officials that a warrant was about to be issued.

The school district did not conduct its own background check on the student teacher, Babbitt said, but that policy is about to change.

Student teachers have not been considered employees of Mona Shores Public Schools. The situation is "arranged" between college or university officials and the school building principal. It's an age-old practice that is flawed, said Babbitt, and from now on student teachers seeking experience at Mona Shores must be screened through the district's personnel office.

"The assumption was that the university conducted the background check," said Babbitt. "I do view that as a crack in the system. I imagine this will cause us and many others to manage this through (our) central office. I think this particular incident will serve as an indication of that," said Babbitt.

He said since the incident, school officials were told by local law-enforcement officials that nothing negative was revealed about the student teacher's past.

Western Michigan University officials declined to comment about the matter.

"Any time there is a criminal investigation involved, the university will not comment," said WMU Spokesman Tom Myers.

Babbitt said student teachers in the district are monitored by the supervising teacher, building administrators and a paid college or university representative.

The school district has a policy regarding physical contact with students, and it is based on the "good judgment" of staff persons.

The warrant charging Morden with the sex offense was signed Monday by 60th District Judge Michael J. Nolan. Morden's attorney, Shawn P. Davis, could not be reached for comment this morning.

LaVigne said Morden lived in Cloverville at the time of the alleged offense, but has since moved to the Rothbury area.

"Based on the victim's statement and the suspect's statements, we feel that we have enough information to secure a conviction on this charge," LaVigne said.

The Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office will handle the case because a parent of the victim has a law-enforcement connection in Muskegon County, said Les C. Bowen, chief trial attorney for the Muskegon County Prosecutor's Office. The court proceedings will be in Muskegon County.

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Letters

March 5, 2006

Kids at risk to meth: Legislation is needed

LANSING -- As a follow up to the Citizen Patriot's Feb. 13 article, "Meth lab cleanup focus of new bills," I'm writing to add my support for quick action by the state Legislature to keep our children safe. Sadly, the production of methamphetamine in our area is on the rise. This not only affects users, sellers and law enforcement, it affects the families of those individuals.

That is why I introduced Senate Bill 439 nearly a year ago. It would update Michigan's Child Protection Law to recognize that the manufacture of illegal drugs such as meth in the presence of a child places that child's health and welfare at an unreasonable risk -- and as such should be treated as child neglect. This idea came from a city of Jackson prosecutor's story, shared with me at a town hall meeting I convened in Napoleon Township in 2003, about children found in the presence of adults producing toxic meth.

SB 439 is an important part of the public-safety response needed to address this growing menace. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, children who live at or visit meth production sites face a variety of health-safety risks, including inhalation, absorption, or ingestion of toxic chemicals; exposure to fires and explosions; and other dangers stemming from the hazardous lifestyle associated with meth production.

It's bad enough that adults who use or manufacture meth endanger their own lives. Endangering the lives of innocent children is unconscionable. Michigan law needs to reflect that.

My bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Families and Human Services, but the chairperson of that committee has not been willing to hold a hearing on it. I'm glad members of the Legislature from both sides of the aisle appear poised to follow my lead on this issue and pass these protections, before it's too late.

-- Mark Schauer, state senator
District 19

March 7, 2006

Senate votes to give schools more time to release criminal list

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- School districts would have more time to verify information before releasing the names of workers with criminal records under legislation unanimously approved Tuesday by the Michigan Senate.

As passed by the House, the bill would have given schools 14 days to verify that school employees had committed the crimes listed.

But the Senate changed it to allow school officials more time, exempting the list from Freedom of Information Act requests for 15 business days, essentially extending the extra time for review from two weeks to three.

Under FOIA, public bodies already have five business days to answer a request and can extend the response time for 10 more business days. The Senate-approved bill essentially would give districts up to 30 business days - six weeks - before they would have to release the names of employees with criminal records.

"This will give them (employees) a reasonable opportunity to clear their names when they are wrongfully listed," said Sen. Michael Switalski, D-Roseville.

Lawmakers also changed the bill to require that only the names of teachers who have committed felonies and sex-related misdemeanors would be available to the public, not the names of those who have committed other misdemeanors.

The bill now heads back to the House.

The legislation was prompted by an inaccurate list created under a new law targeting sex offenders in schools. The law required the state to check the criminal histories of more than 200,000 school employees, resulting in a list sent to districts by the state Department of Education.

Federal and state judges recently blocked the state from making the list public, agreeing with at least one teacher's union that inaccuracies could harm the reputations of innocent workers or even cost them their jobs.

While the legislation doesn't specifically require the list to be released, lawmakers are confident the courts will rule it should be made public.

A lawsuit has been filed by an Eaton Rapids teacher who said he was incorrectly on the list for a theft that, if accurate, he would have had to commit at age 6.

Some of the people wrongly listed may have matched people with similar names, while others might have been victims of stolen Social Security numbers, officials said. The state is working to send schools a more accurate list later this month.

The FOIA bill is House Bill 5675.

Michigan Department of Education: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>
Michigan Education Association: <http://www.mea.org>

Published March 7, 2006

Democrats pushing for boycott of video game Police enraged by graphic images of cop killing in game '25 to Life'

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

A recently released video game is more than playing cops-and-robbers to Ingham County sheriff's Capt. Rick Miller.

It represents a potential fallen comrade.

"These games can translate into the real world, and I don't want that to happen with this one," Miller said.

The game, "25 to Life," has raised the hackles of law enforcement and officials nationwide for its graphic and gruesome goal of killing cops. Michigan entered the fray Monday as state House Democrats called for a public boycott of the game, which they called despicable, vile and reprehensible.

"Players win by murdering police officers," House Minority Leader Dianne Byrum of Onondaga said. "These are heroes who deserve our respect and support."

National campaign

Democrats today will introduce a resolution calling for the state's support of a national campaign to clear the game from store shelves.

More than 227,000 people have signed the petition launched by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund after the game hit the U.S. market in January. Lawmakers and officers in several other states also have called for support of the petition.

The game, rented at Blockbuster Video outlets in Lansing, Okemos and DeWitt, and sold at various stores throughout mid-Michigan, carries a mature rating, restricting purchase to consumers over the age of 17.

Using 'human shields'

Players take on the role of a drug dealer who gets into gunfights with police officers, uses civilians as human shields and shoots rival gang members, according to the officers memorial fund.

The Web site advertising the game says players also can take on the role of a cop shooting gangsters.

The Democrats cited studies that link excessive playing of video games by children with violent behavior.

Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, said the game is "the most vile."

"It creates a new low for what we will tolerate in our homes," she said. "This is an advanced lesson in how to be a felon. What happens in the virtual world will be duplicated on our streets."

Messages left Monday with Eidos Interactive, the game's manufacturer, were not returned.

Not selling well

The game hasn't been selling well, said Tommy Fricano, assistant manager of Gamestop at the Lansing Mall. The store ordered about a dozen copies in January but still has several on the shelf. A handful of customers have even returned their copies, he said.

Critics have given it harsh reviews. Blockbuster Video members gave the game two and a half out of five stars. Gamespot, a gaming consumer Web site, described it as "lame" and "dumb" saying it had subpar graphics and voice effects and a confusing story line.

The negative hype surrounding the game probably has made it more appealing to some gamers, said Shawn Sodman, who sells used video games at his Game Hits store in Delta Township.

"It would have went away without all the hype about it," Sodman said. "I never even heard about it until I saw reports of the opposition."

Reminding parents

Lansing Police Chief Mark Alley, who attended the afternoon news conference to support the Democrats' resolution, said he hopes the attention will remind parents to monitor the games their kids play.

"This is really a call to action for parents to be involved in what their kids are doing," Alley said.

House Republicans are not opposed to the resolution, but they would rather see a court injunction lifted on legislation passed last fall making it illegal to sell or rent adult-rated video games to those 17 and younger, spokesman Matt Resch said.

"Having the law enforced will have much more impact than the resolution," Resch said.

The law, signed in September by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, has been on hold since the video game industry filed suit in federal court. A hearing has yet to be set.

Federal courts have struck down video game bans approved by Washington state, Indianapolis and St. Louis County in Missouri, saying they encroached on the First Amendment.

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

If you're opposed

- To sign a petition to take the game out of U.S. stores, go to www.nleomf.com/25tolife.

Police, House Democrats call for game boycott

New game rewards killing of officers

Tuesday, March 07, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporters

State Democrats and law enforcement officers on Monday called for a boycott of a new video game that awards points for killing police officers and allows players to use civilians as shields against police.

They are hoping parents will do what a state law couldn't do - stop the sale of violent games to their children.

"A boycott cannot be challenged" the way a law can, state Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, said at a press conference outside the Milan Police Department on Monday.

Angerer was referring to a federal judge placing on hold a Michigan law that was supposed to halt the sale of "ultra-violent" video games to anyone under the age of 18.

Angerer, whose 55th District includes Milan and Pittsfield Township, is one of seven state lawmakers who announced a proposed resolution, expected to be introduced today, supporting the boycott of the "25 to Life" video game.

The news conference was held just a few feet from where Milan Police Officer Steven Reuther was shot to death on his way to work in February 1991. Interim Police Chief Tim Casey said the man who killed Reuther spent a number of years in psychiatric hospitals, but is currently living in a halfway-house.

The video game, Casey said, is demoralizing, and "spits in our face, the face of law enforcement." He said Reuther's family asked him to denounce it for them on Monday.

Sean Bersell, vice president of public affairs for the Video Software Dealers Association, one of the parties that challenged Michigan's law, said the legislators and law enforcement officials are exercising their right to "let others in the community know about this game."

However, Bersell said, people need to be aware that the game is rated "M" for mature, a designation aimed at limiting games to players over the age of 17. "This game is designed and created for adults and is marketed to adults. And retailers are committed to selling the game and renting the game to adults," Bersell said.

Officials at Eidos, the company that publishes the game, could not be reached for comment.

Officials at the Entertainment Software Association, another party to the challenge of the Michigan law, declined comment.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed a bill last year that would have made it a misdemeanor to sell "ultra-violent" video games in the state. The Video Software Dealers Association, Entertainment Software Association and Michigan Retailers Association appealed the law, which was scheduled to go into effect last Dec. 1. However, U.S. District Court Judge George Caram Steeh granted the plaintiffs' request for a preliminary injunction in November.

Steeh held that the state has not been able to show the "perceived harm" such games would have on minors. There is an "obvious harm that results from stifling free speech," Steeh wrote.

Heidi Watson, spokeswoman for Granholm, said Monday the governor's office is still working to defend the law. The parties are scheduled to return to court March 22. Bersell said the plaintiffs will ask Steeh to make his ruling permanent.

Bersell said parents can take several steps to decide whether the games are appropriate for their children to play, including checking the games' ratings and content, playing the games with their children and talking with them about the games.

The boycott was organized by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. The state Democratic House representatives are running a petition signature drive.

Dan Farough, spokesman for the House Democratic Caucus, said the resolution is an attempt "to add the voice of the Michigan Legislature to the boycott."

Matt Resch, spokesman for Republican House Speaker Craig DeRoche, said Monday he had not seen the resolution, but that Republicans supported passage of the bill limiting sale of the violent games last year.

Pittsfield Township Public Safety Director John Phillips said that 50 police officers were killed by guns across the country, in 2004 and 17,500 have died in the line of duty, from all causes, since statistics were first kept. Legislators are seeking 17,500 boycott signatures, one for every officer killed in the line of duty, Phillips said.

"The fact that these game makers are shooting cops for fun astounds me," Phillips said after the press conference.

He said 11 police officers and one prison corrections officer have been killed in the line of duty in Washtenaw County. "We're the good guys, not something to be shot at in reality or in a game," Phillips said.

Angerer said she is "morally outraged" at the video game, because "cops are our partners in keeping our communities safe, our heroes."

"How can we expect children to respect teachers on Monday morning, when they spend their weekends killing cops?" she asked.

More information on the boycott can be obtained at www.nleomf.com/25tolife.

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

Breaking news

Dems call for boycott of violent video game

March 6, 2006

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

LANSING – House Democrats called today for a public boycott of a recently-released video game, “25 to Life,” in which players try to kill police officers to win the game.

House Democratic Leader Rep. Dianne Byrum, D-Onondaga, said the game, like other violent video games, could teach children to act out violence as well as view police as acceptable targets of violence.

“Police are heroes who deserve our respect and support,” Byrum said. “They must not be victims of violent video games.”

The call for a boycott joins a national campaign by the police organizations to keep children and families away from the game. An online petition against the “25 to Life” can be signed at www.nleomf.com/25tolife. The petition is sponsored by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

Rep. Kathy Angerer, D-Dundee, called the game “the most vile, it creates a new low for what we will tolerate in our homes.

She added, “This is an advanced lesson in how to be a felon. What happens in the virtual world will be duplicated on our streets.”

The Democrats cited studies that link excessive playing of video games by children with violent behavior.

National studies show the average age of video game players is 31. The game “25 to Life” has gotten poor reviews, including recently in the Free Press.

Unpaid medical bills pile up

\$740M tab jabs hospitals

Cuts in Medicare and Medicaid benefits to poor, greater use of ER needle Metro systems.

Sharon Terlep / The Detroit News
March 7, 2006

Metro Detroit's major hospital systems had to suck up nearly \$740 million in unpaid medical bills last year, a troubling side effect of cutbacks to health care programs for the needy and the region's staggering economy.

The flood of unpaid bills come as a growing number of patients are showing up in emergency rooms without the money or health insurance to pay their bills.

"We are seeing an increase in people who just defer going to their doctor as much as they can because they lack of any type of health care," said Ben Carter, chief operating officer of the Detroit Medical Center. "Then they're really sick when we see them."

Cuts in Medicare and Medicaid programs in particular are taking a toll on Metro Detroit health systems. And hospitals are even struggling to collect from patients whose bills are partially covered by health insurance.

Unpaid bills, or uncompensated care, reported by the region's health systems increased by about \$163 million between 2004 and 2005, with the problem reaching every hospital from Detroit to the Oakland County suburbs.

Hospitals must cover the shortfalls by cutting costs, increasing fees and drawing more cash-paying patients.

Uncompensated care typically includes shortfalls in what is covered by Medicare and Medicaid as well as bills that go unpaid altogether. Some of the money is reimbursed to health systems through Medicaid and Medicare systems designed to compensate for shortfalls.

The DMC racked up \$285 million in unpaid bills at its seven hospitals, a 30 percent increase from 2004. Some of that increase came when the state scrapped a program that reimbursed hospitals for non-Medicaid patients. Much of it, though, is a result of fewer people having the means or insurance to pay, Carter said.

Henry Ford Health System saw its uncompensated care costs increase to \$142 million from \$127 million. St. John Health's costs rose to \$142 million from \$130 million.

Problems aren't confined to Detroit. Dearborn-based Oakwood Healthcare System couldn't collect on \$57 million in costs, up from \$48 million in 2004.

Royal Oak-based William Beaumont Hospitals saw its unpaid bills jump more than 50 percent, to \$110 million in 2005 from \$71 million in 2004. More than half of that increase comes from Medicaid payments that fall short of covering the cost of services, said Beaumont spokesman Mike Killian.

Beaumont has the nation's second-highest number of patients who use Medicare, the federal health care system for the elderly and disabled, Killian said.

In addition to the problem of the uninsured, Beaumont is having more trouble collecting on co-pays owed by people who have insurance, Killian said. "Even insured people are having trouble paying now," he said.

More patients have trouble covering co-pays and deductibles that are rising fast as employers scramble to keep health care costs down. The only consolation for hospitals is that the rate of growth for unpaid health care bills is slowing. Henry Ford and St. John health systems saw smaller increases in 2005 than the year before.

"It's a sign we're doing a pretty good job in getting increased access to primary care," said Cynthia Taueg, St. John vice president for community health.

The region's health systems have been working with other community service providers to open more federally subsidized health care centers. More centers have opened in recent years in Detroit, which has long faced a shortage of clinics to care for the uninsured compared to what's offered in other major cities.

Nearly 1.2 million people in Michigan, or about 12 percent of the population, lack health coverage. The swell of uninsured continues as businesses cut back or eliminate the health benefits they offer employees.

About six million fewer Americans received insurance through their employer in 2004 than in 2000, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Some critics say health care providers sometimes overstate the problem of unpaid medical bills in making the case that they should receive more funding.

"While providers say they have no control over these costs and they're a victim of the system, I don't think that's true," said Jack Hadley, a researcher with Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute.

Hadley said it is common for hospitals to limit ER capacity or divert ambulances to other hospitals as a way to limit the care for patients who can't pay, thus keeping down the cost of the uninsured. "They have some control," he said.

In Southeast Michigan, hospital officials are bracing for another year of increases. St. John, for example, expects its uncompensated care costs to top \$147 million in fiscal 2006, a nearly 10 percent increase from 2005.

If Detroit's Winifred Mills becomes ill, she could join the ranks of uninsured patients in the emergency room. The 58-year-old has been without health insurance since losing her job as a purchaser for Shell Chemical Co. two years ago. She hasn't been to a doctor since then and can't afford preventive care. "If you have a catastrophe in this situation, you have nothing," Mills said. "You're at the mercy of the system."

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Arkansas Set to Undertake a Novel Effort in Health Care

By ROBERT PEAR
The New York Times

Published: March 7, 2006

WASHINGTON, March 6 — The Bush administration is poised to approve an innovative health insurance program, proposed by Arkansas, for 80,000 low-income uninsured people in the state, officials said Monday.

Arkansas will carry out the program, to be announced on Tuesday, under a waiver allowing the state to receive federal Medicaid money for coverage that does not meet the usual Medicaid standards for eligibility and benefits.

The employer-based program is novel in two ways. The benefit package is extremely limited, much more austere than Medicaid's. In addition, if an employer wants to participate, it must guarantee that all its employees, regardless of income or other factors, will be covered.

"Everyone in the employment pool has to have coverage," Mike Huckabee, governor of Arkansas, said in an interview. "Employers cannot cherry-pick the employees who get coverage."

Under the plan, to be approved by Michael O. Leavitt, secretary of health and human services, the state expects to enroll at least 50,000 workers with incomes less than twice the federal poverty level and 30,000 workers with higher incomes. The poverty level this year is \$9,800 for an individual, \$13,200 for a couple.

Mr. Huckabee, a second-term Republican, said the new program would help small businesses that currently offer no health insurance. That help will enable them to compete better for workers with larger companies that do provide benefits.

"Forty-six percent of all workers in our state are in companies that have fewer than 100 employees," the governor said. "Only 26 percent of companies with fewer than 50 workers offer any health benefit."

Federal officials said the Arkansas program could be a model for other states that want to expand coverage without substantially increasing costs.

People who sign up for the program will receive a basic benefit package covering six doctor visits a year, seven days of inpatient hospital care a year, two outpatient hospital procedures or emergency room visits a year and two prescription drugs a month.

Beneficiaries will have to pay an annual deductible of \$100 and 15 percent of the cost of each service, with a maximum out-of-pocket cost of \$1,000 a year, state officials said.

In its application to the government, Arkansas said the new program would "cover most basic health needs" of the intended beneficiaries.

"It won't be an elaborate or upscale model," Mr. Huckabee said in the interview. "It will be very basic coverage."

Mr. Huckabee said participating employers would have to contribute \$15 a month for each employee with income less than twice the poverty level and \$100 a month for higher-income workers. Julie R. Munsell, a spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services, said employers could require workers to pay some or all of these fees.

But Dr. Joseph W. Thompson, who helped devise the program as director of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, an independent health policy institute, said: "In reality, employers will have to pay most or all of the premiums for their employees. If a single employee says, 'I don't want to participate,' the employer becomes ineligible for the program. The employer could not get the benefit for any of its employees."

David Johnson, a Democratic member of the Arkansas House who worked on legislation for the new program, predicted that it would be attractive to small businesses.

"Employers will get more bang for the buck from this program than from private health insurance," Mr. Johnson said. "They can insure employees for a predictable, modest amount, which is less than they would have to pay to private insurers."

Mr. Johnson said the state would help pay for the new benefits with proceeds of the multistate settlement negotiated with tobacco companies in 1998.

Other states have subsidized or supplemented health insurance provided by employers. But Dr. Thompson said this was not an option in Arkansas because most small employers provided no coverage.

"Small businesses have money in their pockets, and they want to offer some health insurance," he said, "but they cannot afford the products on the market."

Health aides push wage hike

By MELANIE THOMAS

The State News

March 7, 2006

Home help workers are joining forces across the state to push for higher wages to improve Michigan's home health care system. The Michigan Quality Home Care Campaign wants to convince state lawmakers to pass legislation to raise wages, add insurance and require training for in-home help workers to reduce the number leaving home health care sectors.

"It is clear as a state that we can't provide care simply in a nursing care facility," said Bob Allison, spokesperson for the campaign.

More than 100 seniors, representatives from disability rights groups and local elected officials traveled to Lansing on Tuesday to urge legislators to raise Medicaid funds as part of the campaign.

In Michigan, there are about 42,000 home help aides helping more than 50,000 disabled persons, seniors and terminally ill patients with daily tasks, such as eating and household chores.

Home help worker Christopher Dowell of Holt said some money should be used toward training and to get better wages.

Without insurance or paid vacations, home help workers have little reason to continue working in their field, Allison said. Balancing wages in Michigan is a campaign goal.

On average, Michigan home help workers are paid \$6 per hour. Some counties pay more than \$10 per hour, while others pay only Michigan's minimum wage of \$5.15. Lansing home help workers earn about \$6 per hour.

The home care workforce faces an annual 35 percent turnover rate — leaving many seniors, terminally ill patients and disabled people without quality home help aides, Allison said.

If there aren't enough home help workers, many people must move into more expensive nursing homes, Allison said.

Home health care costs \$30 per day and a nursing care facility costs \$130 per day, Allison said. Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed \$20 million in February to raise aide wages from the state minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour to \$6.60 per hour, said Greg Bird, director of communications for the Office of the State Budget.

"It will help retain workers that we have and hopefully attract new workers to the system," Bird said.

The Senate's Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee on budget proposals heard testimonies from home help workers and people who receive care, said Justin Winslow, the legislative director for Sen. Tony Stamas, R-Midland. Stamas is the subcommittee's chair.

"It's an issue of a scarce budget with limited resources and if there is going to be an increase to anyone," Winslow said. "It's not a matter of if they deserve an increase, it's a matter of if there is going to be the money to give them."



Sentencing Delayed For Teen Who Admitted To Mom's Death

Judge Has Reservations Regarding Deal With Prosecutors

POSTED: 8:15 am EST March 7, 2006

PONTIAC, Mich. -- Sentencing for a 16-year-old who admitted to killing his mother has been put on hold because the judge said he had reservations regarding the boy's deal with prosecutors. Christopher Dankovich (pictured) has pleaded guilty to second-degree murder for stabbing his mother, Diane Michele, 111 times, on April 24 in their Rochester Hills home.

Dankovich agreed last month to serve 22 1/2 to 34 years in prison and was to be sentenced on Monday.

However, Oakland County Circuit Judge John McDonald said in court Monday that he did not feel comfortable with the sentencing agreement. He said he was not convinced that the teenager would not be a threat to society after his release.

McDonald said he wants to review information on Dankovich's competency to stand trial. He ordered the defense to provide more information from the teen's forensic psychological examination. The sentencing is to resume March 13.

Published March 7, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Tuesday's letters to the editor

Highfields cares

I am a teacher in the Grand Ledge school system. My history with Highfields Inc. goes back 25 years. I have been on its campus many times, toured its school and living units, and talked to students in the residential program.

I saw children who were happy that someone cared for them and was willing to give them an opportunity to work on their problems. Each time I have visited campus, I have seen nothing short of a positive and caring atmosphere.

I see children every day who lack direction and are crying out for assistance. Highfields has been there for 40-plus years to answer those cries, and has always done it with the utmost respect for the needs of the children and their families.

Angela N. Pincumbe
Lansing

Homeless group calls for anti-bias rule Discrimination a reality in public places, speakers say

Tuesday, March 7, 2006

By Kathy Jessup

kjessup@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8590

Advocates of a proposed human-rights ordinance say they may camp out for a night near city commissioners' homes if Kalamazoo doesn't outlaw what they say is discrimination against the city's homeless.

A dozen speakers organized by the Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network spent more than an hour chiding commissioners Monday for not acting on the proposed ordinance, criticizing policies of local homeless shelters and claiming Kalamazoo's homeless face discrimination at public facilities, parks and businesses.

KHAN spokesperson Adriana Rosas said the group may protest lack of action on the ordinance by spending the night of March 31, National Night Out for the Homeless, on public property near commissioners' homes.

Kalamazoo City Commission members responded that the group's criticism of agencies providing food and shelter here may actually undermine the help those agencies provide vulnerable people. And the ordinance, which would ban discrimination in public or private places on the basis of people's "real or perceived" economic resources, is likely unenforceable, City Attorney Lee Kirk said.

"We will be a constant thorn in your side until you pass this ordinance," one shelter resident told commissioners. "Play games with the homeless, and God's going to play games with you."

"We're going to do anything necessary within the law to get this ordinance passed," said Lori Anne Fuller, a KHAN member who is homeless.

Kalamazoo's homeless receive "cruel treatment," said Emily Jones, a Western Michigan University student who said she represented several campus student organizations. "Do not push us any farther, because our backs are already against the wall," she told commissioners.

Commissioners David Anderson, who chaired a subcommittee reviewing the proposed ordinance, and Mary Balkema, who sits on the governing board of the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission, took issue with the criticism.

"To call the Mission a prison is offensive," Balkema said, referring to charges by some human-rights-ordinance advocates.

"Many, many cities have problems with homeless people that are worse than Kalamazoo," Anderson said. "We do have a system on the backs of caring, generous people here so that nobody has to go hungry or sleep outside if they don't choose to."

To help the homeless, Anderson said, the city should focus on affordable-housing initiatives.

"There is discrimination against people in this community because of their economic status," Commissioner Don Cooney said. "But they tell us this ordinance is unenforceable."

A child is waiting

Brave Kevin, 13, has a good sense of humor

Rosemary Dorr / Special to The Detroit News

An enthusiastic skateboarder who wants to learn tricks, even compete in the X-Games, Kevin is also a "big-time fan" of Harry Potter books and movies. Because, explains the 13-year-old, "He's very talented. He's not a coward. I love magic."

"Magic" won't bring Kevin the family he wants ("a happy family who'd love and care for me, take time out to listen to what I have to say and not argue in front of me," he says), but Kevin has talents of his own. He shows bravery, too, and a sense of humor, despite rough times.

"Major rough," says Kevin, whose brown eyes are often smiling.

"He's a very likable child," notes the supervisor at the therapeutic residence where Kevin has lived almost four years. "He's talkative and can be very funny."

An eighth-grader in special education classes, Kevin says, "I'd like something more challenging. I like science and inventing. My favorite thing is art. I'm very active. I'm a good boy."

His adoption worker notes that Kevin has an active mind, is learning to express his feelings effectively and needs to stay busy. He needs a patient, understanding family that will make a firm commitment to him.

Please consider adoption and talk with Laura Francoeur at Wayne County Dept. of Human Services, (313) 396-0381.

Last column's child: Shakyra, 12, is ready to sing, dance, play and learn. She's compassionate toward animals, too. For information, call Lisa Avery at Catholic Social Services of Wayne County, (313) 883-7760.

A Child is Waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.

Charities on the Hill

Washington Post Editorial

Tuesday, March 7, 2006; Page A16

PENNSYLVANIA Sen. Rick Santorum created his charity, "Operation Good Neighbor," when the Republican National Convention was going to Philadelphia in 2000. "I thought: 'Wouldn't it be a great thing to leave something positive behind other than a bunch of parties and a bunch of garbage,' " Mr. Santorum told the Philadelphia Inquirer at the time. But in the years since, Mr. Santorum's charity appears to have done a lot to help his political allies -- and less than it might have in its stated mission of combating poverty, teen pregnancy and other social ills.

According to reports by the American Prospect magazine and the Associated Press, Mr. Santorum's charity spent \$1.25 million between 2001 and 2004, but it devoted just 40 percent of that to charity. (A letter from the charity's treasurer, who also serves as treasurer of Mr. Santorum's political action committee, explains that fundraising expenses alone are "close to 37% of expenditures, as these fundraising events are recreational outings such as golf tournaments.")

Meanwhile, a Santorum campaign fundraiser, Maria Diesel, received nearly \$200,000 in fundraising fees from Operation Good Neighbor; another Santorum campaign fundraiser, Rob Bickhart, received \$75,000 in salary from the charity since 2001, and Mr. Bickhart's business, Capitol Resource Group, rents office space to the charity.

The Santorum story highlights a largely unexplored area of congressional ethics: lawmakers' involvement with charitable organizations. According to a 2004 review of Internal Revenue Service records by the research group PoliticalMoneyLine, 48 members of Congress are connected to charitable foundations. These groups may do good works, but they also present opportunities for misuse -- to bolster members' political operations, for example, or to underwrite swank parties at political conventions.

Politicians and their spouses hit up companies and lobbyists that have interests before them to contribute to their pet charities, personal and otherwise, often dangling the lure of access to themselves and colleagues. Christine DeLay, the wife of former House majority leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), was remarkably straightforward about this phenomenon in a recent interview with Post columnist George F. Will that touched on the DeLays' charitable efforts on behalf of foster children. "I hated to lose the leadership position because it helps me to raise money for those kids," she said. And this all takes place outside public view, since, unlike political contributions, charitable donations aren't publicly reported -- though lawmakers obviously know who's kicking in to help their cause.

We're all for altruism, but that's not necessarily what's going on here. There is an inevitable element of extortion whenever politicians get involved in soliciting charitable donations. And when lawmakers have a personal interest in the charity, the opportunities for abuse are greatly magnified. Provisions contained in an ethics measure approved by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs last week, and parallel language offered by House Democrats, would require that lobbyists report donations they make or arrange to lawmakers' charities, or gifts they make to other charities in recognition of politicians. That would shed some valuable light on a now-dark corner of money and politics.

Michigan

Search for labor chief to resume

March 7, 2006

BY DAWSON BELL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Gov. Jennifer Granholm resumed the search for a new director of the state's top regulatory department Monday after her first choice, former Lansing Community College President Paula Cunningham, was forced to withdraw.

Cunningham, a surprise pick by Granholm to replace Department of Labor and Economic Growth Director David Hollister, was deemed ineligible to take the position because of a conflict created by her continued ties to the state-funded community college.

Although Cunningham stepped down as president Jan. 31 after a showdown with the LCC board over her management skills, she remained on a leave of absence as part of her severance agreement.

Granholm made the nomination only hours after Cunningham's abrupt departure from LCC, drawing immediate questions from the Republican majority in the state Senate.

Those questions continued until last week, when Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, sent a letter to Granholm suggesting that Cunningham's appointment would violate state law prohibiting simultaneous employment by two government agencies. Sikkema asked Granholm to delay Cunningham's start date, scheduled for Monday.

But shortly after noon, Cunningham notified Granholm she was withdrawing and Granholm killed the appointment. Granholm issued a brief statement in which she expressed regret that the contractual issues with LCC could not be resolved and praised Cunningham as a "great leader." Interim Director Robert Swanson, a former deputy to Hollister, will continue in that role.

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.

Granholm's pick for top economic post drops out

By Amy Lane
Crane's Detroit Business

March 06, 2006 3:36 PM

Former **Lansing Community College** President Paula Cunningham on Monday withdrew her name from consideration to become director of the **Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth**.

Cunningham was Gov. Jennifer Granholm's choice to lead the department, and a state Senate committee next week was scheduled to hold a hearing on her proposed appointment.

But Cunningham had negotiated a separation agreement with the college, and in a Monday letter to Granholm she said that both Michigan law and her separation agreement "raise questions about whether I can legally serve as director under the terms of that separation."

State law prohibits department directors from engaging in outside employment.

A March 3 memorandum from Senate Republican legal counsel discusses Cunningham's separation agreement and that she would be on a paid leave of absence from LCC until next February, presenting "a clear issue of whether her continuing status as an LCC employee conflicts with her employment" as the department's director.

Heidi Watson, Granholm's deputy press secretary, said Granholm "expressed regret" that the contractual issues could not be resolved. Granholm said Cunningham is a leader who "understands the important impact workforce development and higher education will have in Michigan's continued economic growth."

Watson said Bob Swanson will remain the department's acting director until a new director is selected.

Cunningham was to fill a post vacated by department director David Hollister, who left to lead a new Lansing-area regional economic development organization called **Prima Civitas**.